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MISSIONARY WORK

AMONG THE

DEPRESSED CLASSES AND THE MASSES.

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Missionary work, no matter what may be the condition of the people among whom it is prosecuted, must have the same object; the bringing of souls to Christ, and the gathering together of believers into a Church organization with all the necessary means for maintaining and advancing spiritual life. Yet the methods of work must be modified to some extent, by the condition and religious belief of those among whom the work is prosecuted.

The importance of the work among the depressed classes, and the relation it bears to work among higher classes, is well set forth by the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor., 1: 26-29. It is true now, as it was then, that "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise." The fact that Mission work in India has had its greatest success among the lower classes, is a proof that it is of God, and gives us encouragement for the future. In the Punjab, as in other parts of the country, our largest accessions are from the lower classes. Some progress has been made among several of these, but the largest numbers have been received from the Churas, who are among the lowest. The street cleaners and scavengers in the cities are from this class, and in the villages, they are principally employed as day-labourers, the hired help of the farmer. Some few are engaged in farming, some are dealers in hides, but the greater part of them are very poor. Their circumstances are such as render work among them difficult. They are numerous, and are distributed over a good portion of the Punjab, but the work among them has been principally in the districts north and east of Lahore, (Siálkot, Gujránwála, Gurdaspur, Amritsar and Lahore). Work among these people, show the difficulties to be met in the evangelization of the masses in India. A successful work among the most ignorant classes, will make the evangelization of the more intelligent masses an easier taske. A practical exemplification of the power of Christianity to elevate the low and degraded, will be its best recommendation to others. This work therefore has an importance, far greater than the elevtion of this particuar class. It is the commancement of a

movement, that must continue and increase until all the people are included.

What is the best method of conducting the work among these classes? This is a question that has not yet received a solution satisfactory to all. It is evident that when the people begin to turn to Christ in large numbers, the methods pursued at first when inquirers were few, must be modified or given up. Then the inquirer was separated from his people, and protected from persecution; a house was given him, usually in the Mission Compound; support was furnished to him, mostly in the shape of some kind of employment, or, if a young man, he would be placed in a school. Then, after having been kept for a considerable period under surveillance, and well instructed, he was admitted to baptism, and given permanent employment, or assisted in getting it. Without entering into the question as to whether this was the best method of conducting Mission work at first, it is evident that when large numbers are inquirers, some other plan must be adopted. It would not be possible to provide houses or employment, even if it were desirable, even colonization would prove inadequate. The course pursued in this work appears to me to be the only practicable one. The people remain in their old homes, and employment unless it is one that is inconsistent with a Christian profession. The instruction they receive must be given at such times as will not interfere with their daily occupations. These necessary conditions make the work of instruction difficult, and when we take into account, the fact that very few of this class are able to read, and that we must depend entirely upon oral instruction, it is evident that they cannot acquire the same degree of knowledge of the doctrines of Christianity, as was usual with the inquirer under the Compound system. To insist on the same degree of progress in knowledge in the applicant, and the same amount of supervision before baptism, is simply to put a stop to all rapid progress among the uneducated masses under consideration. If we believe the promises of the Bible, we ought to expect large ingatherings from the world; yet everything like a mass movement among the people is looked upon with distrust by many Missionaries. They have become so accustomed to having but few inquirers, that they have practically ceased to look for more. The Apostles were not afraid of mass movements, or of hasty baptism. There could not have been much examination to test knowledge or motives on the day of Pentecost, where three thousand were added unto them "in one day." How many Missionaries working according to the methods of the present day, would be willing to receive a man with his family in the same circumstances as the Jailor at Philippi was baptized by Paul, "the same night" when he had been frightened by an earthquake? *Prudence* would have suggested a delay; an explanation of earthquakes on scientific principles, in order to be sure that he had no improper motives. He should also have been required to commit to memory the Creed, Commandments and Lord's Prayer. These restrictions are of a later date than the Apostles' time. There is this to be said on the other hand that there were no worldly induce-

ments then. When " bonds, stripes and imprisonment," awaited the convert there was no need to wait to see whether he was prompted by worldly motives. But how does it come that there are such temptations now ? Hindus and Muhammadans do not offer bribes to induce people to become Christians, and the worst enemy of the Government cannot bring the charge of partiality towards Christianity. If any inducements are offered, they must come from the friends of Mission work and it should be within their power to remedy this evil. The real question to be settled then is, shall we reform our methods or change God's plan for the evangelization of the world? If from the commencement of Missionary work, no material aid had been offered to converts and enquirers whether in the way of employing them as assistants in the work or in any other way, the real progress would have been much greater.

The evil effects of this system of giving aid is felt in work among the lowest and has been a serious hindrance to its real progress. There is nothing wrong in a man wishing to better his worldly condition. He would not be a true enquirer if he did not desire something better. All that is necessary for us, is to see to it that no offer of a material aid be made ; on the contrary it should be clearly understood by all applicants that help in worldly matters will not be given. If this course is pursued and firmly adhered to in all our dealing with Christians and inquirers, there will be no need of taking the precautions that now seem necessary.

The nature of instruction given before baptism. From what has already been written it will be evident that this must necessarily be elementary. They cannot read, and all instruction must be oral ; they have never had any mental training, and it seems impossible for some of them to commit anything correctly to memory. They have one advantage over the high caste people ; they know and acknowledge their degradation and sinfulness. They have a very vague idea of God, and their religious creed is very limited. In working among them, therefore, we find the fewer errors to refute and less opposition to our teaching. It is hard to lay down a law as to the amount a man should learn before he is admitted to baptism. If he knows that he is a sinner and sincerely repents and makes a credible profession of his faith in Christ, he should be received. When Peter saw that the spirit was poured out upon the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius, his question was not, " ought these to be baptized ?" but " can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized ?" The burden of proof rested upon those who would refuse. The only reason for delaying in the present case is the fear that there may be some other motives, but as has already been remarked, it should be within our power to prevent any such motives. Besides there is an objection to delaying baptism unduly. If the applicant is kept for a long time in doubt as to whether he will be received or not, (and the probation would have no meaning if this were not the case), he could not retain the warmth and fervour of a new convert. When there is reason to doubt the

sincerity of a professed inquirer, then delay is proper and necessary. The amount of knowledge required must be measured to some extent by the capacity of the applicant.

The question of mass baptisms has not been a practical one with us. It is expected that each applicant should be separately examined as to his knowledge of way of salvation. It is better to have this examination before the time appointed for baptism. As far as possible each candidate should be examined separately, so that one may not prompt another in answering. With these precautions I do not see that the number received at once is at all a question for consideration. I do not wish to be understood as condemning the baptism of large numbers, together without special examination; there is nothing in scripture opposed to it, and the time may come when the spread of the knowledge of the Gospel, and the complete removal of all worldly inducements, will render our duty so plain, that none will hesitate to receive all who may come, but as we are at present situated we have not found it necessary, nor do we think it best.

The nature of instruction given after baptism. In his commission to the Apostles, Christ commands them to teach their disciples "to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." There is therefore no limit to the amount of doctrinal teaching, to be given except the capacity of the person to receive it. They are to be taught "to *observe* all things;" hence our principal care should be to see that the life of the convert is made to conform to his profession. It is much easier to the convert to gain a theoretical knowledge of Christianity, than it is for him to make it his rule of life; to give up the heathen customs that have become a part of his nature almost, and adopt his mode of living to his new belief. It is one of the most perplexing questions we have to solve how to provide for the proper pastoral supervision of these converts; poor and ignorant and scattered in small groups over a large district, and subjected to annoyance and persecution from their non-Christian neighbours and employers. The spiritual growth and development of the Church depends on the care and instruction of these new converts, and yet the aggressive work must go on. When a man presents himself for baptism his acceptance or rejection must be decided by his fitness, and not by the consideration of the wants of those who have already been received into the fold. The establishment of schools for the instruction of the children has been a valuable aid in advancing the people in knowledge. Catechetical instruction is more profitable to the people than a formal service.

Moral and spiritual results produced. To judge of the results produced, it is first necessary to fix upon a standard by which we can make a comparison. If it is expected that these people should equal in spiritual attainments, the Christians of our home churches then the results are disappointing. It would not be doing them justice to compare them with converts from the more intelligent classes. It is scarcely 20 years since this movement commenced, and the greater part of the accessions have been received, within

the last 10 years. It is, therefore, too soon to look for decided results. Due regard must be had to their unfavorable circumstances before referred to. For instance with regard to the Sabbath; their dependence on their Hindu and Mahammadan employers makes it hard for them to observe it properly. Their extreme poverty makes it hard for them to give up the use of carrion, to which some of them have always been accustomed. It is hard for them to adapt themselves to the requirements of the Christain marriage law. It is not strange that a law originally designed for a different race and clime should be hard to adjust to meet the wants of a people, who have scarcely ever felt the restraints of law in this matter. The difficulty of getting a sufficient number of persons qualified to obtain license for the solemnization of marriages, has hindered our progress in making the people conform to the law. For instance there are some who live 20 miles distant from the nearest Marriage Registrar, and it may not be convenient for him to go at the appointed time, the parents then have the alternative of violating their ideas of propriety, by sending their daughter away unmarried in search of a Registrar, or of contenting themselves with a ceremony, adequate in their own opinion, but which does not meet the requirements of English law. I have mentioned some of the obstacles to progress. It will require time to overcome them, but they are not insurmountable.

It is but fair in estimating the progress to look at the condition of those villages where the most work has been done, and where the people have been longest under instruction. In such places, the attendance at worship is regular; their old heathen habits are abandoned; marriages are solemnized in accordance with the Christian law. It is reasonable to expect that time and faithful instruction will bring all up to this standard.

There is one encouraging feature in this work; the number of defections are comparatively few, and most of these can be traced to the want of care in receiving them.

There has not been much progress in the establishment of self-supporting congregations. There are not many villages that are far enongh advanced, to be ready for organization. There is nothing to be gained by haste in so important a matter. The people have never been accustomed to giving regularly of their earnings for any purpose, and it will require time to teach them this duty.

There are some of whom we have to speak as the Apostle did of false professors of old. "They are the enemies of the Cross of Christ; whose end is destruction; whose God is their belly; whose glory is in their shame; who mind earthly things;" but then again our hearts are gladdened by the evidence of true faith and trust in God. During the prevalence of cholera and fever the past summer, they suffered severely in some places; there were a few places where the sick resorted to their old superstitious practices, but these were very few. The greater part remained firm, and those who died gave evidence that their faith in Christ was steadfast.

The best methods of work for the future. We must admit that mistakes have been made in all departments of Mission work, and it is our duty to correct them. The most serious error that has been committed was the introduction of the system of giving material aid to converts. Very little of this has been done among these converts, but the effects of this little has been felt. The association of the Missionary and his message, with the idea of obtaining through him some worldly advantage has seriously hindered the real progress of the Gospel. One great object in our future work, therefore, should be to free ourselves from the financial burden resting upon us. So long as the Missionary occupies the position of paymaster to his Native assistants, there never can be the mutual love and confidence between them that should exist between co-labourers.

Another idea in this connection; the present system of paying from Mission Funds, all who are engaged in the work of instructing the Christians, prevents the extension of the work. We cannot afford to hire all the teachers needed for the present number, and if the numbers increase as rapidly in the future, it will be impossible to make the necessary provision for their instruction under the present system of a paid agency. Until the Christians support their instructors and pastors, we are hindered in making our advances. A change in our system is required, and it should be made a special object to throw the support of these teachers upon the people. When this is done there is no limit to the extension of our work, but without this we cannot expect to make rapid progress. The pastors that will be placed over these poor people must be content with a bare living. We have few who would be willing to endure the privations that they would be called upon to undergo at first in undertaking a pastorate. We should make it a special object to prepare men to serve as pastors, and teach the people the duty of supporting them. We have not had success in this direction yet; perhaps we have made the standard for admission to the ministry too high. One thing is certain we must find men qualified for pastors, who are willing to live on much lower salaries than the ministers receive that are now in employ. Until this difficulty is removed, our progress will be retarded.

Before closing, I would urge the importance of pressing the work among the lower classes. They include in some places, in the rural districts at least, nearly one-fourth of the population. It is not probable that they will always remain in this outcast condition. In the northern part of the Punjab most of the Churas have become Muhammadans, and I have found some among us here who have made the change. Efforts have been made by others of the lower classes, to be recognized by the Hindus. A writer some years ago expressed the opinion that in the course of the next 50 years, they would all be absorbed into the Hindu castes, or become Muhammadans, if they are not brought to embrace Christianity. As far as the Churas are concerned, this change will take place rapidly. They will not remain Churas. They are inclined to Christianity and

we trust it will not be many years before they will all be under instruction, and be ready to accept Christ as their Saviour. The Spirit of inquiry is spreading among others. The work commenced among the Mengs long ago, and although it has been overshadowed by the more extensive progress among the Churas, it has not ceased. Other kindred classes such as the Doms, Batwals, are favorably inclined. May it not be the will of God, that the Gospel is to show its power in transforming those who have been so long down-trodden and that they will be His chosen instruments in bringing those who have despised and oppressed them, to the foot of the Cross? Whether this be the case or not, it is clearly our present duty to care for those that He has given to us. May the time soon come when the hearts of all, high and low, will be thus open to receive the Gospel.

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